The Pandavas Retire Timely

by Sankirtan dasa

Scene One - Hastinapura, the Palace of Maharaja Yudhisthira

(Yudhisthira is sitting, quietly reflecting. Bhima enters.)

Yudhisthira: Bhima, is there any word from Arjuna?

Bhima: Not a word since he left for Dvaraka.

Yudhisthira: He has been gone seven months!

Bhima: If only he would return (wind sound)

Yudhisthira: Yes, just to bring news of Lord Krsna Krsna This head though crowned with a silk turban, if not bowed before the Personality of Godhead is a heavy burden only. And these hands they may be decorated with glittering bangles, but if they are not engaged in Krsna's service, they are like the hands of a dead man.

Bhima: By His grace only our prosperous kingdom and good fortune have been possible. When He is with us, fear retreats to a distant place. (increase wind sound)

Yudhisthira: Bhima , how cold it is.

Bhima: Unusually cold.

Yudhisthira: There is disorder in the seasons. It rains when the sun should shine. (fade out wind)

Bhima: And throughout the country, farmers are losing their crops.

Yudhisthira: It's frightening. It is as if the direction of eternal time has changed. And there are disturbances in my kingdom which astonish me. The people have become greedy, angry, deceitful. They adopt foul means of livelihood more and more.

Bhima: Now the simplest dealings are corrupted by cheating, even between friends. And there is constant misunderstanding between parents and children, between brothers. Even between husband and wife there is strain and quarrel.

Yudhisthira: How can this be? The citizens were always happy! No one was disturbed by mental anxiety or physical suffering, nor by the

elements. Nor did people resent one another. Certainly, no one quarreled over trifles. They understood the higher principles of life.

Bhima: Now, they've become accustomed to greed, anger and pride.

Yudhisthira: Ahhh!

Bhima: What is it, Yudhisthira?

Yudhisthira: The left side of my body trembles!

Bhima: An ill omen!

Yudhisthira: O Arjuna, Arjuna, why have you been gone so long?
(A jackal howls.) Listen.

Bhima: The cry of a she-jackal!

Yudhisthira: She cries at the rising sun and vomits fire.

(Barking dogs are heard.) Dogs bark fearlessly.

Look! This pigeon

Bhima: It is like a messenger of Death!

Yudhisthira: The shrieks of the owls and crows make my heart

tremble. It's as though they would render the whole universe void. (pause)

Bhima: Smoke encircles the sky.

Yudhisthira: The earth and mountains seem to throb. The wind blows violently, blasting dust everywhere, creating darkness. The earth and mountains seem to throb. The wind blows violently, blasting dust everywhere, creating darkness. Clouds rain blood!

(Thunder 3x)

Bhima: What is this extraordinary time? What is coming?

Yudhisthira: The calves refuse to suck the teats of the cows nor will the cows give milk. Tears stream from their eyes. Cities and villages are bereft of beauty, devoid of happiness. Confused people are enraged and weeping and weeping. (wind sound)

Bhima: Even the Deities in the temple appear to cry lament and perspire. They seem about to leave! What calamities await us, Yudhisthira?

Yudhisthira: I wish I knew. These earthly disturbances foreshadow a great loss of our good fortune. The world was fortunate to be marked with Lord Krsna's lotus footprints but these signs indicate that it will no longer be. I fear the Age of Destruction has begun.

(Arjuna enters.)

Arjuna! Oh, my brother!

Bhima: Arjuna!

Yudhisthira: Home at last! Welcome! Welcome!

Bhima: How happy we are to see you!

Yudhisthira: We've lamented in your absence!

Bhima: You must be tired. Please sit down.

Yudhisthira: Now, my brother, tell us - are our friends and relatives of the Yadu family well?

Bhima: Are they happy, Arjuna?

Yudhisthira: How are

Bhima: How are Pradyumna and Aniruddha?

Yudhisthira: How are Uddhava and the others, Lord Krsna's constant companions?

Bhima: Do they remember our welfare?

Yudhisthira: Arjuna! Are you well? You look pale. Arjuna, what's wrong?

Arjuna: O King, you ask about our friends and relatives, the Yadus? They were cursed by a brahmana to fight among themselves. They then became intoxicated with wine and fought amongst themselves with sticks, not even recognizing one another. Now, all but four or five of them are gone.

Bhima: All of them, gone?

Yudhisthira: No! And, what of Lord Krsna? Our Lord, to Whom we owe everything has He left us? Oh, my brother, I see no other reason for your being so devastated.

Arjuna: O King! The Supreme Personality of Godhead, Who treated me as an intimate friend, has left me. I have lost Him Whose separation for a moment would render all the universes void - like bodies without life.

The king of Heaven and all the demigods once tool shelter of these arms marked with the Gandiva bow. And I, empowered by Krsna, defeated their enemies. Now, I am bereft of the Supreme Lord by Whose influence I was made so powerful. In the war at Kuruksetra, the strength of my enemies was like a vast ocean. It was insurmountable but, with Krsna as my chariot driver, I crossed that ocean. Great Generals - Bhisma, Drona, Karna - all directed their invincible weapons against me but, by Krsna's grace, they could not touch a hair on my head. It was due to lack of esteem for my Lord that I dared engage Him as my chariot driver, for He is worshipped and offered service by the best men to attain salvation! Yet, to me He was a casual friend.

O King! His joking and frank talks were pleasing and beautifully decorated with smiles. He would address me, "My friend, O son of Kunti, O best among the Yadu dynasty! " We would live together, sleep, sit and stroll together. At times we would boast of chivalrous deeds and whenever He exaggerated, I would reproach Him, "My Friend, You are very truthful!" Do you remember, Bhima? Even in those moments when I minimized His greatness, He would tolerate my words exactly as one true friend excuses another or a father excuses a son.

O Emperor! On the road from Dvaraka, I was defeated like a weak woman by a band of cowherdsmen while I was guarding the bodies of the wives of Krsna. I, who protected the King of Heaven, could not save them! I have the same Gandiva bow, the same arrows, the same chariot, drawn by the same horses and I use them as the same Arjuna to whom all kings offered their due respects. But, in the absence of Lord Krsna, they have become null and void!

Yudhisthira: Arjuna . do not all events occur by Lord Krsna's

supreme will?

Bhima: Yes, is it not by His will that we experience happiness and by His will that we also experience distress?

Yudhisthira: I once said to Him, "My Lord, we depend on You completely, yet sometimes we are put into so much difficulty. How can this be?"

"Yes," Krsna said, "I can be very dangerous to My devotee. If I especially favor him, I take away everything he has and put him into great difficulty."

Bhima: He does this just to increase our dependence and love for Him.

Arjuna: Yes.

Bhima: People are surprised that Krsna descends to this mortal world and behaves like one of us, but we understand. He performed these activities just like an actor on a stage.

Yudhisthira: Do not think Krsna is like us; forced to take birth and finally shoved into the jaws of death.

Bhima: Krsna is completely independent. He appears and disappears by His own sweet will.

Yudhisthira: Remember His words, Arjuna. That's all you have to do. Remember.

Arjuna: His words yes, I remember now. The first day of the great battle - the armies were poised, ready to fight. I said, "O Krsna, O infallible one, draw my chariot there between the two armies. I wish to see with whom I must fight.

Scene Two - The Battlefield of Kurushetre

(Krsna should appear to be distant or separated as this is a "recalled" scene. You could use a second Arjuna, as the first Arjuna looks on.)

Krsna: Behold, O Partha, the Kurus assembled there. Grandfather Bhisma, your teacher Drona, Uncle Salya …

Arjuna: So many relatives and friends take up weapons against me!

Krsna: Take up your bow, Arjuna!

Arjuna: What possible benefit can there be in slaying our own well-wishers? O Krsna, of what use are kingdoms, happiness or even life itself, if they are to be enjoyed alone? Let them kill me, unarmed and unresisting, but I will not fight.

Krsna: My dear Arjuna, how have these impurities overtaken you? You, who know the progressive values of life? You must fight to regain what is rightfully yours.

Arjuna: No, not even to gain a universe, let alone this earth!

Krsna: Then what will you do? Leave the battlefield?

Arjuna: Yes!

Krsna: To live in the forest?

Arjuna: Yes!

Krsna: Duryodhana will say that you fled the battlefield like a coward. Your reputation will be ruined. For one who has been honored, dishonor is worse than death! What could be more painful for you?

Arjuna: The Kurus, intoxicated with greed, see no fault in slaying their own kin. But we understand that this action is sin. To destroy a dynasty will leave the women unprotected and irreligion will cast us into hell. Alas, strange it is that we should commit such horrible sins only to enjoy royal happiness.

Krsna: Happiness? A warrior does not fight for happiness, nor does he avoid fighting out of distress. Fight as a matter of duty, Arjuna, and you will never incur sin.

Arjuna: But, to slay Grandfather Bhisma and Drona, who merit instead our worship Better to live by begging than to enjoy riches tainted with their blood!

Krsna: O chastiser of enemies, cast off this petty weakness of heart.

Arjuna: Is it better to slay them or to be slain by them? O Krsna, now I am confused about my duty and I have grown weary. I beg You What is best for me? I am now Your disciple, a soul surrendered unto You. Please enlighten me.

Krsna: Yes, Arjuna, to learn the truth one must approach a spiritual master, inquire from him submissively, and render service unto him. The self-realized soul can impart knowledge unto you because he has seen the truth. Though you speak learned words, you lament for that which is not worthy of grief. My dear Arjuna, never was there a time when I did not exist, nor you, nor all these

warriors. Nor in the future will we cease to exist. As the soul passes in this body from boyhood to youth to old age, so the soul passes into another body at death. The soul who dwells in each body is unborn and eternal. He is not slain when the body is slain, nor can he be cut by any weapon, moistened by water, burned by fire or withered by the wind. Therefore, what need is there for lamentation?

Arjuna: O Krsna, from whom did You receive this knowledge?

Krsna: It was I who imparted this knowledge, long ago, to the sun god, Vivasvana, who in turn revealed it to Manu, the father of mankind. And now, I impart it to you, A, because you are My devotee, as well as My friend.

Arjuna: But, my Lord, the sun god is senior in birth to You. How is it that in the beginning, You instructed him?

Krsna: My friend, although We have journeyed through many lives, I remember all of them, but you cannot, O son of Pritha.

Arjuna: But, why?

Krsna: At the time of death, an ordinary living being forgets everything of his past life due to his change of body. But, My body of bliss, knowledge and eternity never changes and never dies.

Arjuna: Then, why do You come to this world of Death?

Krsna: To deliver the pious and destroy the miscreants and top reestablish the principles of religion, I come. One who understands the nature of My appearance and activities, Arjuna, does not take birth again in this material world, but attains My

eternal abode.

Arjuna: Krsna, I have always thought of You as my dear Friend but, tell me, Who are You really? What is Your origin?

Krsna: I am the origin of all the worlds. The entire creation emanates from Me and the wise who know this fully engage in My devotional service and worship Me with all their hears. To them, I give the understanding by which they may come to Me. Out of compassion for them, I, dwelling in their hearts, destroy the darkness born of ignorance with the shining lamp of knowledge.

Arjuna: O Supreme Person, how can I meditate upon You?

Krsna: My dear Arjuna, always think of Me, become My devotee, worship Me and offer your homage unto Me. Thus, you will come to Me without fail. I promise you this, because you are My very dear friend. Abandon all varieties of religion and just surrender unto Me. I shall deliver you from all sinful reaction, do not fear. O son of Kunti, have you heard this attentively and are your illusions and ignorance now dispelled?

Arjuna: My dear Krsna, Infallible One, my illusion is now gone. I have regained my memory by Your mercy. I am firm now and free from doubt and I will act according to Your instruction.

Scene Three - the Throneroom of King Yudhisthira

Yudhisthira: Hear me, my brothers, for so long I have engaged in service to the state, now let me engage in service to the all-powerful Lord. I shall go to the north, following the path of my forefathers and absorb myself completely in thoughts of Krsna. What need have I of for a comfortable bed when there is the soft ground to lie on? What is the need for a pillow when I have my arms? And when

there is ample covering of the bark of trees, why do I need opulent clothing?

(Yudhisthira places his crown upon the throne.)

Arjuna: Yudhisthira!

Yudhisthira: As for the throne, my grandson Pariksit is well-

trained and fully-qualified. He will be a good and just ruler.

Bhima: Yudhisthira!

Yudhisthira: Bhima, don't be sad that I am going. Let's remember Krsna and chant His holy name, I don't know how much nectar the two syllables Krs - na have produced. When I chant the Lord's holy name, it appears to dance within my mouth. I then desire many, many mouths. And when that name enters my ears, I desire millions of ears. And, when the holy name dances within the courtyard of my heart, it conquers my mind and frees my senses from all material bondage. Do not fear that I am leaving you. No, if you are chanting and I am also chanting, there is no separation between us. Farewell, Bhima. Farewell, Arjuna.

Bhima: Devotional service to Lord Krsna is our supreme destination.

Arjuna: Yes, constant chanting of His holy names is the doubtless and fearless path for all.

Bhima: Arjuna, let us follow Yudhisthira!

Arjuna: All the way Home!

(They all exit.)